

LITTLE BEAR AND THE LOST OTTER BABY

BY FRANCES MARGARET FOX

One morning, while Little Bear was out camping with his father and mother, he went into the woods to pick daisies and bluebells with which to decorate the entrance to their cave. His hands were full of flowers, and he was ready to go back with them to his mother, when he heard a baby crying. Little Bear stood still and listened. Then he knew that the child who was crying was an Otter baby. He had heard Otter babies cry before.

"What is the matter, baby one?" called Little Bear. "What are you crying about and where are you? Did you bump your nose?"

"I am lost! Come and find me!" answered Baby Otter.

"You are hiding behind the oak stump!" exclaimed Little Bear, as he scrambled through the thicket and fairly pounced upon Baby Otter. "I spy!" he shouted.

"It isn't a game!" wailed the Otter baby. "I tell you I am lost! I don't know where my mother went and I can't find my father! I want to go home. Oh, boo-hoo-hoo!"

"There, there, don't cry!" said Little Bear. "Tell me where your camp is, and I will take you home just as fast as we can go."

"But we do not live here!" complained the lost baby. "Our home is Brookside, a long way off across country, and we are only camping out, and I do not know where our camp is! Boo-hoo-hoo-hoo!"

"Come, come, cheer up!" said Little Bear, using the very words his father often used when speaking to him. "I tell you I will take you home, and if it is too far away I'll ask my father to go. We are camping out, ourselves, down the river a little way. Now tell me how you happened to get lost."

So the Otter baby told him that the Otter family had gone out together after breakfast that morning, and that while they were laughing and chatting Baby Otter had strayed away from the path to pick flowers. The next thing that he knew he had been alone, and, not knowing what else to do, he had sat down and cried.

"Well, wipe your eyes now, and give me your paw!" said Little Bear in big, grown-up tones. "My father showed me your camp only yesterday, and, if you are one of the campers, you live only a little way from here and I can take you home."

Of course Baby Otter wiped his eyes and walked happily behind Little Bear. He wished to travel in single file, Otter fashion.

It happened that Father Bear had been teaching Little Bear how to follow the woods trails, and Little Bear knew the Otters' path, because they always went round stumps and under logs; besides, their legs were short and their bodies so heavy they left well-worn trails behind them.

At last Little Bear reached the end of the crooked path, and Baby Otter, without so much as saying "Thank you!" to Little Bear, ran to the cave by the river bank where his family was camping out.

"Some people always forget their manners," said Little Bear to himself, as he ran home to tell his father and mother what he had done.

"I am glad you were good to the baby," said Little Bear's mother, as she took the bluebells and daisies that he had brought and put them into a hollow stump beside the cave door. She had filled the stump with water from the spring while Little Bear was gone.

"The flowers are lovely!" said Mother Bear. "Now please run into the woods for some green leaves and vines to put with them, Little Bear."

Before he could do as she told him, Uncle John Kingfisher came flying to invite the Three Bears to a party. "The Otters," said he, "request your presence at a fish dinner. Come now."

"We thank you, Uncle John Kingfisher," said Father Bear. "We will start at once. Come, Little Bear, wash your hands and face and get ready."

That is how it came about that the Three Bears dined with the Otters that day, on trout, salmon, and eels, and were served with only one bite from each fish, and that bite taken from the meat just behind the head.

Mother Bear thought that the Otters chose only one dainty morsel from each fish just because they had invited company for dinner. But Father Bear told her afterward that she was mistaken; Otters always serve fish in that way when fish are plentiful.

After dinner the Otters and their guests rested for a while, and then Father Otter urged the children to come out and play with him and with Mother Otter. Much surprised, the Three Bears followed the Otters to their playground. And the next Father Bear and Mother Bear knew, Little Bear was sliding down the Otters' toboggan slide and shouting with glee. All the Otters went down that slide, one behind the other, and landed splashety-splash! in the river below.

It was a wonderful sight to see the Otters swimming about in the stream, because they are beautiful swimmers. But what Father and Mother Bear liked best was the picture of Little Bear running up the roundabout path to the top of the bank and going down the slide three times as fast as the Otter children and their parents. The Otters were more at home in the water than Little Bear was, but they could not run on land as he could.

Their next game they played with sticks. One Otter took the end of a stick in his mouth and another Otter took the other end, and then they pulled and pulled to see which was the stronger. Little Bear did not like that game so well as he did the toboggan slide.

“We have had a delightful time at your party,” said Mother Bear to Mother Otter, at last, “and we thank you for inviting us over. If you ever wander into our home woods, come to our little house and have porridge with us.”

“We shall be glad to do so,” said Mother Otter, “and we shall always think kindly of Little Bear because he brought our baby home when he was lost. If we do go to visit you, you must let us make Little Bear a toboggan slide.”

“Ask them to come as soon as we get home!” urged Little Bear in a whisper to his mother so loud that the Otter children heard it, and laughed.

